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RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA IMMEDIATE 3695
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE IMMEDIATE 4826
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 002357

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SUBJECT: KOMEITO: "YES" TO EXPANDED ROLES FOR JAPAN'S MILITARY, "NO" TO COLLECTIVE SELF DEFENSE

REF: TOKYO 1767

Classified By: AMBASSADOR J. THOMAS SCHIEFFER, REASONS 1.4(B),(D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Komeito, the LDP's indispensable partner in Japan's ruling coalition, has changed it's policy on Japan's right to use military force. Responding to four scenarios currently under consideration by a panel of experts appointed by Prime Minister Abe, the Komeito holds that the use of force is acceptable, but must be explained as an exercise of individual, rather than collective, self-defense. A senior Komeito Diet member denied to Embassy Tokyo that the Komeito leadership has made a formal decision regarding the work of the panel considering collective self defense. However, he confirmed that the Komeito would back expanded roles for Japan's military in the four scenarios under consideration. Komeito, linked closely to the pacifist-leaning Buddhist sect, Soka Gakkai, has consistently opposed efforts to reinterpret or revise the Constitution to allow expanded missions for Japan's Self Defense Forces. Komeito is engaged in a delicate -- and sometimes contradictory -- game of balancing the demands, as a partner with the LDP and PM Abe, of responding realistically to new challenges to Japan's security while not alienating their still strongly pacifist grass roots supporters. End Summary.

Yes, BUT: Enhanced roles for the SDF,
but no Collective Self-Defense

¶2. (C) On May 24, the Sankei Shimbun reported that the Komeito has "decided to allow the country to exercise the right to collective self-defense in four scenarios under study, provided the government interprets them as falling within the scope of the right to individual self-defense." The Sankei is only partially correct, according to a Komeito Diet member Isamu Ueda, who chairs the party's Policy Research Committee. Ueda (protect) told Embassy Tokyo that there has been no formal decision by the Komeito leadership to make a change, but that the party would support the use of force in the four scenarios if the justification was made on the basis of individual, rather than collective self defense.

¶3. (C) Prime Minister Abe convened the Forum to Reconstruct the Legal Base for National Security on May 18, drawing sharp criticism for stacking the deck in favor of a more expansive constitutional interpretation by appointing panel members who were predisposed to supporting collective self-defense. The four scenarios the panel is directed to examine involve the use of military force to:

- intercept a ballistic missile aimed at the United States;
- defend a U.S. warship sailing alongside a Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces vessel in open waters;
- protect military forces from another nation participating with the JSDF in a UN peacekeeping operation (PKO); and
- provide rear-area logistical support to U.S. and multinational forces.

Panel members have told the Embassy (reftel) that their recommendations are likely to be folded into a future Permanent Dispatch Law, or a revision of the basic Self-Defense Force Law.

¶4. (C) The Komeito does not object to the panel discussions on the four scenarios, according Ueda, but continues to oppose any change in the interpretation of the Constitution that would allow Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense. Ueda, who was aware of the seeming contradiction, said Komeito's "basic policy" is to accept all four scenarios "as they are," without linking them to collective self-defense, which is and should continue to be

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prohibited under the current interpretation of the Constitution. Changing to a new interpretation now will only create a "major political stir" and make the government seem inconsistent and unreliable, Ueda predicted. Ueda believes that the panel could use "clever logic" to define the use of force in each of the scenarios as necessary "for the defense of Japan," i.e. "individual self defense."

Party Leader Ota: Keep bar on Collective Self Defense

¶5. (C) Komeito leader Akihiro Ota stated unequivocally on May 1: "The interpretation of the Constitution that does not allow Japan to use the right to collective self-defense must not be changed." He also criticized the experts panel, noting that the members were skewed toward the right and included individuals who favor Japan developing nuclear weapons. According to Ueda, Ota made his views plain to Prime Minister Abe in a recent meeting. Ueda reported Abe agreed with Ota on the importance of consistency and that it is too early to revise the Constitution.

¶6. (C) In response to the new panel, Komeito's Diplomatic and Security Affairs Research Council launched its own discussions on May 10. Komeito has historically been cautious over moves to reinterpret or revise the Constitution, fearing blowback from its pacifist-leaning Soka Gakkai lay Buddhist supporters. Komeito Diet member Tetsuo Sato told the Embassy in April (reftel) that 95 percent of Komeito members are opposed to any reinterpretation of Article 9. Some Embassy contacts were predicting that Abe would not push too hard on collective self-defense so close to critical House of Councilors elections in July. Komeito support will be crucial to maintaining a majority in the Upper House.

¶7. (C) The current evolution in Komeito thinking appears to draw heavily from former Secretary General Tetsuzo Fuyushiba, currently Minister of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport, who has maintained the concept that Japanese forces operating

in the "Far East," as defined in the Mutual Security Treaty, can already respond to threats against U.S. territory or military assets under the principle of individual self-defense. According to this logic, an attack on U.S. assets in the region is also an attack on Japan's national security, which depends on U.S. Forces. Komeito Secretary General Kazuo Kitagawa seemed to echo Fuyushiba's analysis when he told the press on April 25 that many situations, such as intercepting a ballistic missile targeting the United States, could be dealt with adequately under individual self-defense. However, while Fuyushiba's reasoning might be used to support a Japanese military response in either of the first two scenarios, it does not readily accommodate the others.

¶8. (C) Comment: Komeito is engaged in a delicate -- and sometimes contradictory -- game of balancing the demands, as a partner with the LDP and PM Abe, of handling new challenges to Japan's security while not alienating their still strongly pacifist grass roots supporters. The new approach of the Komeito leadership to allow a "work around" of the ban on collective self defense is not a substantial shift from what we have been hearing privately for some time. Going public with it now is probably a tactic to defuse the potentially destructive debate within Komeito and Soka Gakkai if the four scenarios panel process leads Abe to announce a form of "limited collective self defense."

¶9. (C) Comment continued. Embassy Tokyo's Komeito contacts have made it clear that they think Abe is moving too fast on constitutional reform and military issues. They are particularly concerned that the timing of the panel's deliberations this close to the July Upper House elections may cut support for the coalition. By putting up a hard front (no collective self-defense) but at the same time

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offering a viable alternative (approval of the four scenarios) the Komeito leadership can both reassure their Soka Gakkai constituents, and avoid a public split over defense policy in the LDP-Komeito coalition.

SCHIEFFER